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Statement Hearings before Subcommittee on State Department

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OPENING STATEMENT BY
CHAIRMAN, SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

Hearings before the Subcommittee on
State Department Organization
and Public Affairs

Thursday, July 30, 1959

10:00 a.m.

The Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs is convened at the direction of the Committee on Foreign Relations. This hearing, today, is prompted by a series of newspaper articles prepared by Mr. Albert M. Colegrove. The articles contain a number of serious and disturbing allegations with regard to the aid-programs and related United States' activity in the Republic of Viet Nam.

I should like to make clear at the outset that Mr. Colegrove's articles are merely the precipitant of this inquiry. For some time, there has been a growing public expression of concern over the administration of aid and related activity not only in Viet Nam but elsewhere in Southeast Asia and throughout the world.

The purpose of this hearing and whatever further inquiry this subcommittee may decide to make is to explore the concern, to sift the reports, to try to understand clearly what, if anything, is seriously wrong in the administration of the mutual security program and other official overseas activity. May I say that I bring to this Chair an open mind as far as specific allegations or charges in reference to the aid-program in Viet Nam are concerned. I have chosen deliberately not to speak about this matter, with Mr. Colegrove or the government witnesses or anyone else directly concerned prior to this hearing. Now that we have begun this inquiry, however, I would express the hope that the Executive Branch will hold all persons either in Washington or Saigon who may have intimate knowledge of Mr. Colegrove's allegations, available for interrogation by the Subcommittee. We want to get at the facts in order that we may act intelligently and constructively, within our capacity as an instrument of the United States Senate, in an effort to correct such short-comings as may exist.

In any inquiry of this nature, there are grave risks. There is the risk of damage to the reputations of innocent persons. There is the risk of damage to the foreign policy of the nation and to the instruments by which it is conducted and upon which the safety and welfare of the people of the United States heavily depends. There is the risk of a great flare of sensationalism which, before it moves on to the next sensationalism strikes down much that is essential and

and desirable in a blind effort to get at what in the end may prove to be relatively minor, if undesirable.

I know that I speak for my colleagues when I say that this subcommittee recognizes these risks, that we are determined to proceed in a fashion which minimizes them. This subcommittee is not a court. No one is on trial here--not Mr. Colegrove, not the State Department, the I.C.A. or the aid-program as such. Nor is this subcommittee responsible for the conception or the administration of the foreign policy of the United States. It is an arm of the Senate and its functions are essentially and preponderantly legislative. I ask the witnesses who appear in open session to bear in mind this criterion as well as the risks to which I have alluded. In an effort to get at the facts I shall permit, as Chairman, a full and fair exposition by all witnesses. But unless otherwise directed by the subcommittee, I shall not hesitate to rule out of order in public session any statement, documentation, or other evidence which raises the risks I have already mentioned in an unnecessary fashion or in a fashion which is not germane to the purposes of this subcommittee. The subcommittee will consider such evidence in Executive session and determine in that fashion its disposition.

With these ground rules, so to speak, as background, I wish to set forth what, I believe, lies within the province of this subcommittee and what does not. At issue, here, is not our foreign policies with respect to Viet Nam. Nor is the concept of foreign aid as an instrument of that policy at issue. Our foreign policies, as I understand them, are aimed at sustaining and strengthening the independence of south Viet Nam, and its friendly ties with the United States and other free nations. I know of no member of this subcommittee who disagrees with that basic aim of policy.

Nor do we have at issue here, the concept of foreign aid as an instrument of that policy. The Congress has recently authorized the continuance of the foreign aid program with an awareness that a substantial part of the funds authorized will be employed for furthering the aim of our policy with respect to Viet Nam. I know of no member of this subcommittee, who, having endorsed the foreign aid program, does not believe that funds under that program should be used to strengthen the independence and advance the self-reliance of the people of Viet Nam.

These, then, are not at issue--neither foreign policies nor the concept of foreign aid. What is at issue is the fashion in which aid and related programs have been and are being administered in Viet Nam and elsewhere. The question with which we are concerned is whether or not--given the

very considerable sums of public funds which have been expended and are being expended--the people of this nation and the people of Viet Nam are getting a reasonable return in terms of the objectives. To put it bluntly, are we getting our money's worth? Are they? And if not, what can be done about it in a legislative sense? The essential virtue of the policy and the acknowledged value of the instrument of foreign aid by no means justifies waste, extravagance, negligence, corruption or other inadequacies--if, indeed, such exist in administration.

I want to say that in weighing criticism of the aid-program in Viet Nam, it would be well to recognize that there were severely extenuating circumstances at the time these programs began in earnest in that nation. I have some first-hand familiarity with the situation, having visited Viet Nam in 1953, 1954 and 1955--the years of crisis--and filed reports with the Committee on those missions. The President, Ngo Dinh Diem and a young and inexperienced government performed a near miracle in rescuing Viet Nam from chaos and almost certain communist totalitarian oblivion and in bringing about a transition from colonial status to national independence and the beginnings of responsible government. At the same time they resettled in the south hundreds of thousands of refugees from the communist north. These were remarkable achievements and the United States aid-program, whatever shortcomings it may have had, played a highly significant role in bringing them about. I want to make clear that as far as I am concerned, anything which may transpire during the course of this inquiry will not derogate from those achievements.

I say that only to keep the inquiry in perspective. In the chaotic and emergency period of 1953-55, it was relatively easy to make mistakes and highly difficult to register achievements. By the same token, however, what might have been acceptable in the circumstances of 1955 may not necessarily be so in those of 1959 and no activity of this government can depend upon past laurels for its present justification.

As I have already noted, this subcommittee is concerned with the way in which the instrument--foreign aid and related programs--is being used. The current criticisms--of which Mr. Colegrove's articles are but one manifestation--are primarily directed to that point. It seems to me that these criticisms suggest five principal lines of exploration for this inquiry.

1. Is there an absence of a clear-cut sense of direction and purpose in the aid and related programs in Viet Nam and, in consequence, inadequate progress towards national self-reliance?

2. Is there an absence of an integrated, alert and efficient administration of the aid-program and other instruments of policy, in Washington as well as in Viet Nam, and, in consequence, confusion, duplication, waste, delay and ineffective performance under this program?

3. Is there a significant degree of poor judgment, in the design and development of specific projects of aid and is there a significant degree of carelessness or are there corrupt practices in the management of funds with respect thereto?

4. Is there a staff in Viet Nam, excessive in size and inadequate in experience and ability, to administer the aid program with a reasonable degree of effectiveness?

5. Is there a costly and conspicuous mode of life on the part of American officials in Viet Nam, brought about in large part by excessive salaries and emoluments, a mode of life which tends to alienate the people among whom it is lived and to produce undue costs to the American people?

I believe this subcommittee can obtain sufficient facts and informed opinion in these five major areas of exploration to enable us to reach reasonable conclusions. By the same token, I am persuaded that we shall be able to recommend corrective legislation in any or all of these areas if that is indicated.